

JOE FOLK, THE BOODLE FIGHTER, TALKS ABOUT PUBLIC CORRUPTION

Missouri's Gubernatorial Candidate Talks With Mr. Parker on the Subject of Graft.

FIGHT WITH BRIBE TAKERS

Courageous Democrat Relates His Experiences—Boodle Issue as a National Movement.

By Frank G. Carpenter.

(Special Correspondent of The Times-Dispatch.)

ST. LOUIS, Mo., Aug. 27.—I came to St. Louis to see Joseph W. Folk, the young Tennessee Hercules who is trying to clean the Augean Stables of this boodling municipality and boodling State. A young man, a poor man and a stranger—*for he came to St. Louis but a few years ago—he has been fighting the millions of the city, many of whom belong to the old families; he has routed the boodlers who are ready to spend millions to down him and has already a score of them in the penitentiary and others awaiting trial.* Mr. Folk has made boodling a crime in the eyes of Missourians. He stands before the people as the representative fighter against it and has become candidate for governor upon that issue alone. He promises, if elected, to purify the state Legislature and State politics and his friends think him the coming man for President of the United States on a similar issue in 1908.

Joe Folk, the Boodle Fighter.
Before I give you my talk with Mr. Folk let me show you the man. I have had a good chance to study him. I spent last Sunday evening with him at his house on Delmar avenue. He lives in a rented two-story cottage, worth perhaps \$5,000, which stands out in strong contrast to the great mansions of the boodlers farther up town.

He is all force, and the second floor, a little room with a store of good books. There was laughing and chatting in the parlor as I entered the house, and its surroundings were those of peace and good fellowship. Rather than of a man hated by and fighting against one of the strongest parties of both city and State. Mr. Folk impresses me as a man who keeps himself well in hand. He is not nervous. He looks healthy, and I don't think he knows it. He has a whole capital, physical and mental, is ever at his command. He has the iron jaw of a fighter, reminding me at times of Napoleon, McKinley and Samuel J. Randall. Indeed, he looks much like Sam Randall. He has a dark face, a big head, broad and full over the eyes, a big nose and big, outstanding ears. His eyes are large and full, smiling at ordinary times, but flashing fire when he discusses the outrages which the boodlers have perpetrated upon Missouri and his determination to down them. He is clean-cut, dresses well and looks well.

Mr. Folk is a young man. He was born in Tennessee thirty-four years ago, and graduated in 1890 from the Vanderbilt University at Nashville. He came to St. Louis to practice law, and was doing well when he got into politics.

Folk the Politician.
I don't think Folk aimed at a political career. He wanted to be a lawyer, and used politics as a side issue. He was a southerner, however, and the southerner sucks in politics with his mother's milk. The boys discuss politics in the schools, and Folk took to the stump before he was out of college. As soon as he settled in St. Louis he became interested in its politics, and threw himself into the fight for the love of it.

Then there came a street car fight, and the strikers asked him to act for them. He did so, and a little later he was made the candidate for circuit or district attorney. He was elected, and it then became his duty to clean up the administration of the city and its legislative enactments. He had been chosen to prosecute thieves and criminals. Others had been chosen before, but they had discriminated in such prosecutions. Folk came into office with a new pair of eyeglasses. He could not see the difference between a millionaire and a pauper, and the ordinary citizen. Among the first criminals arrested were some illegal voters of his own party.

There was another case that they were prosecuted and the boodlers were thunder-struck. Colonel Ed. Butler, their chief, a man who had started life as a horse-shoer and made millions as a ring politician, called upon Folk for explanation. "Why, Mr. Folk, these men voted for you; you don't mean you are going to prosecute them?" "I certainly do mean it," replied Folk. "There is no reason why I should not do so because I have not looked into their wrongdoing. I had nothing to do with their voting illegally. Suppose I were Vice-President of the United States and the President should be assassinated and I should thereby become President, would you have any objection to my assassinating because his act made me President? I certainly will prosecute them," and prosecute them he did.

That was the beginning. Folk extended his prosecutions to the boodlers themselves, and he has extended them to the greatest slugs of municipal corruption known to the United States. He says he believes that other cities are equally bad and that the purification which is now going on in St. Louis will be gradually extended to other parts of the country.

Millions for Votes.

In these investigations Mr. Folk found that millions had been spent for votes. In our talk Sunday night he told numerous stories, describing how the city had been robbed of its integrity after instance of enormous boodling. Said he:

"For twenty years past St. Louis has been in the hands of a ring just large enough to control the city legislature and override the mayor's veto, and this ring has leveled blackmail upon every license, privilege and franchise granted by the city. Laws have been unblushingly sold to the highest bidder. The ring has tried to sell the waterworks, the courthouse and the Union market for its own enrichment. Nothing has been safe from its avarice, not even the sewer pipes in the ground. It has had its regular



JOSEPH W. FOLK, the Boodle Fighter.

schedules of bribe prices, based upon what each business would stand, ranging from a few hundred dollars for a switch bill to thousands of dollars for a franchise. Indeed, I believe as much as \$10,000,000 has been paid out in blackmail on such accounts.

The Immortal Nineteen.

"The business has been done by a continuing gang of nineteen, and their subsidiaries," continued Mr. Folk. "It took nineteen votes to control the city council, and these nineteen men passed upon what legislation should be enacted and how much they should be paid for each act or franchise. At one time the combine received \$47,500 for an ordinance to light the city. The bargain was made on the floor of the house of delegates and the money was handed over to one of the combine. After voting the nineteen met at the house of one of their number, and the host sat at the piano and played 'Home, Sweet Home,' while the money was distributed in \$2,500 lots."

A Million Dollars Profit.

I asked Mr. Folk about the Central Traction deal of 1898, out of which a New York promoter made almost \$1,000,000. He replied:

"That was for a franchise which covered nearly all the street railways of the city. The promoter, a man named Snyder, gave \$250,000 in bribes to the municipal assembly to get it. He paid twenty-five out of the twenty-eight members of the house of delegates \$3,000 each, and the seven members of the council \$40,000 to \$70,000 each. One councilman took \$25,000 from other parties to vote against the franchise, but returned it when he found that he could get \$50,000 from the promoter to vote in his favor. He was the first amount, saying he did not think he could honestly earn it. That franchise was sold by the promoter for \$1,250,000, so that he made a clean million out of the transaction. The city did not receive one cent for all the streets it ran away."

"That was the case in which Uthoff figured, was it not?" "Yes," was the reply. "Uthoff was the man who got \$50,000 for his vote and gave back the \$25,000 which the opposing parties had given him to vote for them. The promoter, however, had promised Uthoff \$100,000 upon his saying that \$50,000 was not enough, and with this understanding Uthoff gave him back the \$50,000, expecting to get \$100,000 the next morning."

"That night the promoter left for New York, taking all the money with him. Uthoff had voted for the bill and had nothing. He took a pistol and followed the promoter to New York. They met at the Waldorf Hotel, and there, under the influence of a bottle of champagne, Uthoff was made to compromise his claim of \$100,000 for \$5,000 cash. At the same time he signed a statement that he knew the promoter was not corrupt, and that he believed he would be as far from offering a bribe as he (Uthoff) would be from accepting one if offered."

How a Boy Made \$50,000.

One of the queer cases described by Mr. Folk during our conversation was the attempted bribery of a man named Meyer in the central traction bill. "The promoters thought they could carry the franchise without Meyer, but they wanted his vote in case one of the other boodlers failed them. They went to his son and handed him \$50,000, saying: 'My boy we are not sure of our majority, and if we need your father's vote we are willing to pay for it. Give this money to him and tell him that he is to vote for the bill, if his vote is required to pass it. In that case he is to keep the money, but if it is not needed he can return the money to us.' The boy took the money. The vote was taken and his father's vote was not required. Therefore, the promoters asked the young Meyer for the

\$50,000, but were refused in language somewhat like the following:

"I don't intend to give that money back. I did not give it to father, for that would be trying to bribe him, and I don't think you ought to have it for you have tried to use it to corrupt us. I think I will just keep it for myself."

He all kept it, using it for a start in business.

Folk Talks of the Governorship.

The conversation here turned to the gubernatorial campaign, and I asked Mr. Folk what he would do if he were elected. He replied:

"If I become governor I shall see to it that bribery is exterminated in our State legislature. The first time a legislator takes a bribe I will send a message to the general assembly asking for his impeachment. I will not allow a corrupt lobby to exist at the legislature, and the day of the sand-bagging legislator will be at an end. I shall use all my power to put corrupt men out of the party organization, and will do what I can to purify party politics. I shall recommend laws forfeiting franchises obtained by bribery and protecting witnesses who testify in bribery cases. In short, I intend to do all I can to wipe out bribery and corruption in the State of Missouri."

Boodle Issues as a National Movement.

"Do you expect to see the anti-boodle issue extend to other States?" "I think it is already doing so. Public sentiment in regard to such matters is changing, not only in this State, but throughout the Union. Bribery is becoming a crime in the eyes of the people, and nearly every State is now waging war against such corruption. Until our country has a better case was practically unheard of. Indeed, there is hardly a score of cases in the court reports of the United States. We have had more prosecutions for bribery within the past ten years than within the century back of them. The movement is spreading to other countries, and we are now negotiating with the governments of Europe to close their territories against bribe-givers and bribe-takers. Our treaty with Mexico has already been so amended that that country will no longer be a haven of boodlers."

"Will boodling ever become a national issue?" "I do not know," replied Mr. Folk. "It certainly ought to be a national issue. Its suppression means good government, and unless we can have that the country will go to ruin."

The People and Bribery.

"Give me, Mr. Folk," said I, "your idea as to how bribery could be driven from the United States?" "It is only by the creation of a healthy honest public opinion," said Mr. Folk. "You may put the boodlers in prison, but as long as the people are not down upon them and their acts the business will continue to thrive. The boodlers must be taught that boodling is bad politics as well as bad morals; and the voters are the only ones who can teach them this thing. In my work I expect everything of the people of Missouri. If they will help me I feel that I can do much to wipe out official corruption. But it is the people who will have to do it."

As a Party Issue.

"Will you get the support of the Democratic party in your fight?" "We shall have the support of the better element of it and we don't want that of the corrupt element. We hope to drive the boodlers from the Democratic party and to make that party an example which will give aid and strength to Democracy in every State of the Union. I don't believe in closing our eyes to corruption for fear it will hurt the party. No party can be hurt by getting rid of bad men, nor by cutting off its rotten limbs. I am naturally a Democrat; my ancestors were Democrats, and I have never voted for a Republican, except where one has been put upon the Democratic ticket in St. Louis by party bosses. I believe in the teachings of my party, and I believe above everything in the enforcement of the laws. I know there are Democratic rascals as well as Republican rascals, and in the enforcement of the law I shall know no party."

Don't Want the Machine.

"Then you will not expect to have the support of the machine ringleaders?" "We don't want the support of the St. Louis machine. I should hate to think I could carry certain wards here which are controlled by that machine. It is in the party for revenge only, and we do not want that kind of support. If I cannot become governor without promising to any one I prefer not to be governor. If I cannot be free to do my duty as I see it to my party and to the people I would much prefer to retire to private

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Views of a Burglar AS TO "BUSINESS"

Erroneous Ideas Corrected Concerning Burglary as One of the Fine Arts.

"It's a common idea I know," said the retired burglar, "that the burglary business must be tremendously profitable because whatever you make in it is all clear gain; but there couldn't be a greater mistake."

"It ain't the percentage of profit that counts so much, my son; it's the volume of business you do. You might have a business that was all profit and yet lose money at it. Let me illustrate."

"I knew a man once that was dead stuck on the drug store business. He wasn't a drug man himself, but he had the same idea about the drug business that many people have about the liquor business—that you can't fail to make money in it. He said to himself: 'Well, here, there's 50 per cent profit on drugs; it's pretty much all profit. You pay 10 cents a pound for stuff and sell it for 30 cents an ounce; and if I can gather in two or three small drug stores, why, I've got easy money.'"

"And he did buy one drug store, and he got his 50 per cent profit, all right; but he only sold about two dollars and a half's worth of stuff a day; and the total receipts wasn't enough to pay the store rent, to say nothing of leaving anything for him; and he got rid of that drug store as soon as he could, and never bought any more."

"It takes something more than a big percentage of profit in business, you see, my son, to make a business pay. As I was saying a minute ago, a business may be all profit and yet not be profitable; and that's the way it is in the burglary business."

"All is not gold that glitters. I've been into houses that looked most promising and found 'em only plated; and I've been spending a minute ago a dollar and a half's worth of stuff a day; and the total receipts wasn't enough to pay the store rent, to say nothing of leaving anything for him; and he got rid of that drug store as soon as he could, and never bought any more."

"And consider the days, or the nights, rather, you've got to do any business at all bright moonlight nights, for instance, when you can't go abroad. Some men on such nights go to places where the buildings are all in the shadow, and so keep busy; but there's more men that lose by the moon a certain number of nights every month, when their expenses, of course, are going on just the same, but with nothing whatever coming in."

"No, sir, the hope is not about the burglary business at all wrong. To begin with, it's only the men of real ability in it, just as it is in any other. The men of judgment and energy and persistence, the capable and hard and steady workers, the rest of 'em, like the majority of men in any line of business, barely make a living at it, if they do that."

"Truly, whatever a man does get, if he gets anything, is all his own profit; but there's no good unless you get enough of them. It's like the drug business; the profits are all right, but you've got to do a business to make it pay."—New York Sun.

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